

HOW THE PLAN WAS DEVELOPED

New Bedford Whaling NHP is founded on the principles of partnership, and the process to develop a general management plan for the park exemplified that concept. The keystone in the process was public involvement.

The National Park Service recognizes that stakeholder participation in park planning is crucial to a successful outcome. Partner institutions, city and port officials, community-based organizations, business and tourism interests, the maritime industry, environmental and historic preservation advocates, the Wampanoag tribe, regulatory agencies, and individual citizens representing only themselves are among the many participants who helped the NPS shape this blueprint for the park's future. The mixture of their thoughtful ideas and insights has produced a better result than a plan developed unilaterally.

A Brief Chronology

In April 1997, just five months after the park's enabling legislation was signed into law, representatives of the then-independent Iñupiat Heritage Center in Barrow, Alaska, visited New Bedford to brainstorm ideas for community collaboration on programs and services. Programs proposed included cultural exchanges, genealogy projects, and distance-learning projects through the Internet and telecommunications.

During May 1997 about 100 people participated in four public scoping meetings held at different community locations. The meetings' purpose was to introduce the planning process and to solicit participants' ideas and concerns about the park. The largest meeting was videotaped and aired on the local cable-access station.

That summer the planning team conducted in-depth interviews with representatives of partner institutions and key interest groups. Each constituency shared information about its organizational mission, future projects, and perceptions of the NPS and its role in New Bedford.

In September NPS representatives of the park and the planning team met with community leaders in Barrow, Alaska. Organizers of the Iñupiat Heritage Center affirmed at this meeting the center's legislated affiliation with the park. NPS staff at Gates of the Arctic National Park and the Alaska Regional Office helped coordinate the meeting and continue to serve as liaisons with the Barrow community.

The following November, a vision, mission, and goals workshop was held at the Bourne Counting House. About 75 representatives of city government, partner institutions, and other interest groups were invited. In small breakout sessions, workshop participants were asked to describe their visions for the park and to respond to and critique draft mission and goal statements. The session was videotaped and broadcast on the city's cable-access channel. The results of the workshop were documented and sent to participants for review and comment. The vision, mission, and goals statements were later publicly distributed via the park's website, a video newsletter, and a traditional newsletter mailing.

The video newsletter was taped and released in cooperation with the local cable-access channel in the spring of 1998. With the Rotch-Jones-Duff House and Garden Museum as a venue, the presentation featured a planning update, baseline research on park resources, and current park programs and activities. The vision, mission, and goals statements were also presented, and viewers were invited to

¹ These include the Rotch-Jones-Duff House and Garden Museum, WHALE, the New Bedford Whaling Museum, the New Bedford Historical Society, the New Bedford Preservation Society, the Schooner Ernestina Commission, the New Bedford Free Public Library, the city of New Bedford, the New Bedford Port Society, and the New Bedford Oceanarium.

comment on them in writing or by phone or electronic mail.

About that same time, students at the Keith Junior High School in New Bedford met with the park staff and planning team to offer their own suggestions for the park's future. Then, in September about 20 educators representing the city's schools, local museums, and other institutions participated in an education/interpretation workshop to generate ideas about programming in the park.

It was also in 1998 that the park's first superintendent arrived. Subsequently, the NPS organized a monthly schedule of "partners in the park" meetings. The participants in these meetings constitute an informal working group whose membership and attendance are fluid. A core group of key partners¹ have regularly attended, but the meetings are open to any interested individual or group. These meetings continue to provide a forum for participants to address park planning and management issues.

In the spring of 1999 a printed newsletter was distributed to 1,300 recipients on the park's mailing list. Its contents included the vision, mission, and goals statements; a description of the research completed in support of the plan; and a planning-process update.

In May of that year, two work sessions were held to discuss resource management issues and flesh out options. The first meeting focused on historic preservation and brought together the NPS, park partners, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the National Parks and Conservation Association. Its participants ratified the park's proposed priorities for historic preservation and helped solidify management options. The second session targeted collections management and

enabled the park staff, NPS professionals in collections management, and park partners to address issues, priorities, and strategies for the long-term care and use of park-related collections.

A second GMP newsletter summarizing the preliminary management options and the park's mission and goals statements was distributed in October 1999. Concurrently, presentation boards depicting the options were displayed in the park's visitor orientation center.

The draft GMP/EIS was available for public review and comment from October 1 to December 1, 2000, and a printed summary of the draft plan was widely distributed. A public meeting was held in October to hear comments on the draft plan. Most of the 50 people who attended expressed support for the management proposal, some with proposed modifications. The NPS also received 20 written responses to the draft plan from other government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the general public.

After analysis of the public comments and some revisions based on that input, the NPS issued the final GMP/EIS in July 2001 for a 30-day no-action period, giving the public one final opportunity to review the plan before it was formally approved. On September 3, 2001, Regional Director Marie Rust, based on the recommendation of Park Superintendent John Piltzecker, approved the preferred management option and signed the Record of Decision, concluding the planning process. The Record of Decision is shown in Appendix D.